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The Character of Early Childhood Education: Perspectives of Ki Hajar Dewantara and Maria Montessori

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Abstract
This research explores the concept of character education for pre-school children based on the perspectives of Ki Hajar Dewantara and Maria Montessori. This research uses a qualitative approach with a comparative analysis method to highlight the similarities and differences of these two educational pioneers. Ki Hajar Dewantara emphasised the integration of local wisdom, independence, and moral values through the principles of 'Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha' (setting an example), 'Ing Madya Mangun Karsa' (building motivation), and 'Tut Wuri Handayani' (supporting from behind). In contrast, Maria Montessori focused on developing independence, discipline, and a sense of responsibility through structured learning environments, individualised learning plans, and the use of didactic materials. Despite their different cultural and historical contexts, both approaches share the common goal of fostering children's character as a foundation for lifelong development. The study concludes by emphasising the relevance of these two perspectives in designing a holistic character education model that addresses cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions for early childhood education.

Keywords: *Character Education; Preschool Children; Ki Hajar Dewantara; Maria Montessori; Comparative Analysis.*

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Introduction

Character development is crucial for young children as it fosters positive personality traits during their golden age. At this stage, brain development reaches 80% of its potential, with 100-200 billion brain cells forming. This period is highly optimal for nurturing the vast potential children possess. Instilling positive values in early childhood is essential for providing a foundation of knowledge that will guide them through their future educational journey (Wijayanti, 2020). Education, as described by (Susandi et al., 2021), is the process of imparting knowledge to students. Parents and educators play a critical role as role models in instilling moral values and character. Given the increasing moral deviations in today's society, immediate reforms in the education system are essential to ensure the next generation can uphold these values and safeguard the nation's future (Harimulyo et al., 2021).

To expand knowledge and theories, it is essential to study various figures to understand their perspectives on early childhood education, rather than focusing on just one thinker. Conducting a comparison of thoughts on early childhood development is necessary.

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Two influential figures with different backgrounds in terms of nationality, philosophy, and education, whose ideas are still relevant today, are Maria Montessori and Ki Hajar Dewantara. The quality of a nation's character plays a crucial role in shaping its aspirations, as character is an essential aspect in enhancing the quality of human resources (Rofi et al., 2019). Since earlier times, many national figures have strived to build and develop education in Indonesia, with Ki Hajar Dewantara being one of the prominent pioneers in this field (Zaidatul Inayah et al., 2024). Ki Hajar Dewantara proposed numerous alternative solutions to address various educational challenges. His vision of character education emphasizes the delivery of materials, advice, and guidance aimed at directing children to act morally, become aware, and develop a sense of responsibility.

Character education or moral education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals into self-reliant, autonomous beings who are capable of self-control and leadership. Ki Hajar Dewantara's concept of character education, often referred to as "education of manners" or "Dewantara's adab education," emphasizes the importance of instilling moral values. From his perspective, early childhood character education should involve role modeling, storytelling, and play-based learning. Teachers are expected to be creative and innovative in shaping students' attitudes through their instructional approaches (Adpriyadi, 2018). The Montessori Method is a learning strategy designed to engage students in real and hands-on activities (Sunarti et al., 2018). Maria Montessori, an Italian scientist, educator, and physician, developed this educational approach, which emphasizes freedom in children's activities. Her method, widely known as the Montessori Method, has gained global recognition (Smart, 2012). To foster a generation with strong character, character education is crucial, especially for young children. Ki Hajar Dewantara implemented character education through habitual practices and positive role modeling. This distinctive approach is central to his early childhood education strategy.

Character education is a process aimed at shaping an individual's personality through the teaching of moral values. The outcomes of this education can be observed in their actions, such as behaving well, being responsible, honest, and valuing others. Policies that reflect a person's character are the values they uphold (Ibrahim, 2018). Ki Hajar Dewantara explains that character education is an effort to cultivate moral character. A person's traits can be clearly identified due to their consistent characteristics, which distinguish them from others (Muhammad Agus Nurohman et al., 2024). Thus, character education carries the same meaning as moral education, aiming to shape individuals into good people through habituation (Munif, 2017).

Given this background, the author aims to explore the concept of character education for early childhood as proposed by Ki Hajar Dewantara and Maria Montessori, both of whom have significantly influenced modern educational practices. In this context, the author raises the following key questions: (1) What is Ki Hajar Dewantara's concept of education? (2) What are the similarities and differences between Ki Hajar Dewantara's and Maria Montessori's approaches to early childhood education? Based on this foundation, the researcher has two main objectives: (1) To understand Ki Hajar Dewantara's perspective on character education. (2) To identify the similarities and differences in character education between Ki Hajar Dewantara and Maria Montessori.

This study explores character education for preschool children from the perspectives of Ki Hajar Dewantara and Maria Montessori. While numerous studies have examined character education based on either of these figures, few have directly compared their approaches, leaving a gap in understanding how the two methods can complement each other. Additionally, many studies tend to overlook cultural and social contexts, which this research addresses by exploring the integration of local and cultural values into the character education frameworks proposed by these two pioneers. Furthermore, previous research provides limited practical guidance on how the principles of Ki Hajar Dewantara and Maria Montessori can be implemented in early childhood education curricula. To bridge these gaps, this study offers a

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comprehensive approach by combining the principles of both figures to create a learning environment that fosters holistic character development. Moreover, it highlights the relevance of their approaches in modern times, particularly in addressing educational challenges such as the influence of technology and social change. As a contribution, this research proposes an integrated character education model that encompasses cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions, offering a fresh and practical perspective for developing early childhood education curricula.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a comparative analysis method to explore the concept of character education for preschool children from the perspectives of Ki Hajar Dewantara and Maria Montessori. The comparative analysis process begins with identifying the key figures and their concepts, selecting these two educational pioneers as the focus of the study. Data is then collected from various sources, including books, articles, and relevant documents on character education as outlined by both figures. The criteria for comparison include educational principles, teaching methods, the role of teachers, learning environments, and expected outcomes. Once the criteria are established, the data is analyzed by comparing the gathered information based on these criteria, followed by interpreting the results to draw conclusions on how the two approaches can complement each other in character education. To enhance reader comprehension of the methodology, tables may be used to summarize the research methods and analysis process, along with flowcharts to visually depict the steps of the analysis, from identifying the figures to interpreting the findings. With this detailed explanation, readers are expected to gain a clear understanding of the methodology and the steps involved in the comparative analysis conducted in this study.(Muhammad et al., 2022). This study utilizes various literature sources to gather the necessary data for the research (Muhammad et al., 2021). The author employs a critical descriptive qualitative method in this research, which emphasizes the ability to analyze data and sources relevant to the existing texts and theories (Ruslaini et al., 2024). This approach is grounded in established foundations derived from intellectual and competent works (Tholibin et al., 2022).

Table 1. Summary of Research Methods

Stage	Description	Data Sources
Identification of Figures and Concepts	Selecting Ki Hajar Dewantara and Maria Montessori as the focus of the study.	Primary literature on both figures
Data Collection	Gathering data from books, articles, and relevant documents on character education.	Books, articles, documents
Establishing Criteria	Defining aspects for comparison, such as educational principles, methods, and teacher roles.	Literature and research framework
Data Analysis	Comparing information based on established criteria.	Collected data
Result Interpretation	Concluding how the two approaches can complement each other.	Analysis of comparative data

Results and Discussion

Early childhood refers to children aged 0 to 6 years who are in the infant, toddler, and preschool stages. Their development may not always progress normally, which can result in abnormalities in early childhood. Independence in early childhood is the ability to perform daily tasks or activities on their own or with minimal guidance, according to their

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developmental stage and capacity. An independent child is one who can stand on their own, meaning they can fulfill basic needs such as using the bathroom, bathing, eating, dressing, and other simple daily tasks. An independent child also has a sense of responsibility in meeting their own needs, without relying on others, and can understand that their needs in the same environment must also be fulfilled. Independence is closely related to the child's self-concept, as well as their self-esteem and self-regulation, which is the ability to manage oneself. This allows the child to understand the demands of their social environment, including how to adapt and behave appropriately. For the general public, independence can be observed through physical actions, such as a 3-4 year-old child being able to feed themselves without assistance, dress themselves, and clean up after using the bathroom. When a child can perform these simple daily tasks, they can be considered physically independent. Another definition of independence is the ability or skill to take care of oneself, both physically and emotionally. Physical independence refers to the ability to manage one's own personal care, while emotional independence involves the ability to make decisions and solve problems with careful consideration. Physical independence greatly influences emotional independence. Failure to fulfill developmental tasks is a form of behavior that does not reflect physical independence.

Concerning the key figures in education, namely the educator and the student, Ki Hajar Dewantara developed ideas from the cultural context of Indonesian education, which resulted in three important mottos. First, *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha*, meaning that an educator must always serve as a role model for their students. The educator must demonstrate good behavior, both in words and actions. Second, *Ing Madya Mangun Karsa*, which emphasizes that a teacher should be someone who motivates, fosters creative ideas, and encourages students, helping them build confidence in their educational journey. Third, *Tut Wuri Handayani*, meaning that an educator must guide students towards productive and socially beneficial work, while also exercising firmness in controlling any forms of freedom that deviate from societal norms. In alignment with these three mottos, Ki Hajar Dewantara also introduced three pedagogical concepts: *Ngemong, Momong*, and *Among*, which all imply the role of nurturing and guiding students. The current national education system is a representation of the educational philosophy developed by Ki Hajar Dewantara. In practice, Islamic education within the national system strives to simultaneously shape, enhance, and strengthen faith and character in Islam, which aligns with the moral and ethical values in national education. Both play a vital role as a medium for all individuals in Indonesia to acquire knowledge. Ideally, both Islamic and national education should focus on efforts to transform values that are essential in addressing the nation's issues (Nawawi et al., 2023). According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, education must aim for clear goals because, without concrete objectives, education cannot function properly or produce the necessary outcomes for human survival. Thus, having clear goals is a fundamental indicator in the educational process. In Ki Hajar Dewantara's understanding, education means enabling individuals to become free, independent in developing themselves mentally, spiritually, and physically (Andrianto et al., n.d.). After analysis, a relationship was found between Islamic education and Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational perspective, which is to enlighten, teach moral values, and achieve human happiness (Yana et al., 2024).

Ki Hadjar Dewantara, in the various books he wrote, did not explicitly use the term 'akhlaq', but rather 'character' or 'character education'. Implicitly, however, the terms 'character' and 'akhlaq' have similar meanings, which can be found in his books along with the term 'character' (Kurniawan et al., 2024). His well-known educational mottos of *Tut Wuri Handayani, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, and Ing Ngarso Sung Tuladha*, as well as pedagogical concepts such as *Momong, Among, and Ngemong*, meaning 'nurturing', are in line with the concept of akhlaq education in Islam. This is in line with the hadith from Abu Nu'aim which reads: 'Study knowledge, and study it calmly and politely, and be humble to those who teach it' (HR. Abu Nu'aim). Ki Hajar Dewantara's perspective on education has similarities with the

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Islamic view, especially regarding lifelong education. In essence, education according to the Quran and Hadith has a broad and universal meaning, which to achieve its perfection requires a lot of time and effort. Therefore, this education is known as lifelong education (Kurniawan, 2023). Education according to Ki Hajar Dewantara also focuses on the idea that humans must continue to learn throughout their lives. This understanding aims for each individual to be able to take responsibility for themselves from childhood to the end of life. Similarities can also be seen between the concept of lifelong education in Islam and Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational thinking. Both Islamic education and his thoughts emphasise the importance of the environment as the centre of the education process. According to Dewantara, education is centred on the environment (Nikita, 2022).

Ki Hajar Dewantara's perspective on education shares similarities with the Islamic view on lifelong education. Essentially, education according to the Quran and Hadith has a universal and comprehensive meaning, and achieving perfection in it requires a long time and considerable effort. Thus, it is recognized as lifelong education (Sulthon, 2017). Ki Hajar Dewantara's view of education also emphasizes the fundamental concept that humans must learn throughout their lives. This understanding aims to encourage every individual to take responsibility for themselves, from cradle to grave. There are also parallels between the concept of lifelong Islamic education and Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy. Both Islamic education and his philosophy emphasize the environment as a central aspect of the educational process. According to Dewantara, education is centered around the environment (Asa, 2019); The family environment is the earliest and most fundamental form of education, focusing on family dynamics. It plays a crucial role in shaping the character and behavior of a person from childhood to adulthood. The family environment has a significant influence on the development of moral values in individuals. It serves as the foundation for everything that will impact a person's life, and thus, the family has a profound effect on a person's moral values. The school environment is the core of education that every person must undergo, as schools are responsible for fostering intellectual intelligence and act as centers for knowledge development. The youth environment refers to the social sphere of teenagers, which has grown significantly in modern times. This environment should be recognized, nurtured, and used to support education within both the family and school settings. In relation to this, Islam divides education into three main environments: formal education (school), non-formal education (community), and informal education (family), all of which contribute to human development.

Montessori's perspective on children is influenced by the ideas of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, which emphasize the importance of a free and nurturing environment for the development of a child's inherent potential. Montessori places significant importance on the existence of the child and proposes the concept of self-construction in child development. She argues that the early phases of life greatly influence subsequent phases, meaning that the experiences a child has in their early life significantly impact their future adulthood. The treatment a child receives from an early age also has a substantial influence on their further development. Montessori's views on children can be understood through her concepts, such as Child's Self-construction, Sensitive Periods, Absorbent Mind, and The Natural Laws Governing the Child's Psychic Growth. As mentioned earlier, Montessori believes that children inherently possess a pattern of psychic development and have a strong motive towards their own self-construction.

Children naturally strive to develop and shape their identities through an understanding of their surroundings. Although they possess innate psychological patterns and vital impulses for growth, this does not mean they have fully formed behaviors. Therefore, children build their development patterns and strengths from birth through educational interaction experiences. According to Lillard (1972 in Sollehudin, 2000), two conditions are necessary for child development: first, the presence of integrated interactions between the child and their environment (both objects and people), and second, the existence of freedom

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for the child. Montessori believes that during the early years, children experience what she refers to as "sensitive periods," meaning they are more receptive to certain stimuli during these times. The sensitive periods identified by Montessori include: a. Birth - 3 years: The mind can absorb sensory experiences b. 1.5 – 3 years: Language development c. 1.5 – 4 years: Coordination and muscle development as well as interest in small objects d. 2 – 4 years: Movement reinforcement, interest in truth and reality, and awareness of the order of time and space e. 2.5 – 6 years: Sensory reinforcement f. 3 – 6 years: Susceptibility to adult influence g. 3.5 – 4.5 years: Writing h. 4 – 4.5 years: Sensory sensitivity i. 4.5 – 5.5 years: Reading In addition, Montessori believes that the child's soul is still in the process of formation. With the knowledge they possess, adults can develop other forms of knowledge. The psychological phenomenon that enables children to expand their understanding is known as the concept of the *absorbent mind*. Through this psychological phenomenon, children can unconsciously absorb information from their environment. They then integrate this knowledge into their psychic lives. The impressions gained through this process not only enter the child's spirit but also shape it. This unconscious process is gradually replaced by conscious mental activities.

To improve the quality of analysis in a comparative study between Ki Hajar Dewantara and Maria Montessori, there are several steps that can be taken to make the findings more insightful and meaningful. First, the research should go beyond simply describing the methods of Dewantara and Montessori and focus on analyzing how and why their approaches are effective in shaping character education. For example, the study could explore the impact of Dewantara's habituation method versus Montessori's structured, individualized approach, highlighting how each contributes to developing character. Additionally, it is crucial to link the study's findings with existing literature, such as Kohlberg's moral development theory or value-based education models, which will provide a stronger theoretical foundation and demonstrate how both Dewantara's and Montessori's methods play a role in character formation. The relevance of their principles in today's educational landscape should also be addressed—how Montessori's emphasis on freedom can help children develop independence in an era full of distractions, or how Dewantara's values can help navigate today's moral challenges. Moreover, the study should offer practical insights for educators, offering concrete suggestions on how to implement Dewantara's character-building approach while utilizing Montessori's child-centered environment to promote independent learning. Finally, the research should provide real-world examples of how schools can blend both approaches to create a balanced and effective learning environment. This could include designing classrooms that encourage exploration while also fostering moral development through interactions. By incorporating these elements, the study becomes more comprehensive, offering valuable insights on improving character education in the context of today's schools.

Early Childhood

Early childhood, referring to children aged 4-6 years, represents a phase of rapid growth and development, laying a crucial foundation for their future life. Research indicates that approximately 80% of brain development occurs during this period, often referred to as the golden age. Children at this stage exhibit diverse characteristics, with each child differing from one another, making them unique individuals. A prominent trait of early childhood is their active nature, with some being highly energetic, dynamic, and enthusiastic about new experiences. They seem to have an insatiable curiosity for learning, especially when encountering something new through their senses of sight or hearing (Dheasari, 2020).

Educational Levels for Early Childhood

Education for early childhood is structured to accommodate the developmental needs and characteristics of children in this age group. It typically includes the following stages: Infant and Toddler Care (0-3 Years): This stage focuses on nurturing and stimulating the physical, emotional, and cognitive development of infants and toddlers through parental care,

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early intervention programs, or childcare centers. Preschool or Playgroup (3-4 Years): In this phase, children are introduced to a structured environment where they can socialize, explore, and develop foundational skills through play-based learning and activities. Kindergarten (4-6 Years): Kindergarten provides a more formal early learning environment that prepares children for primary school. It emphasizes basic literacy, numeracy, social skills, and emotional development through engaging and interactive methods. Integrated Early Childhood Education Programs: Some institutions offer integrated programs combining care and education, addressing the holistic development of children from infancy to pre-primary age. These levels aim to foster children's growth in a safe, supportive, and stimulating environment, ensuring they are well-prepared for their next educational journey.

Early childhood education services cover various levels of education that are widely recognized in society. This education is provided for children aged 0-6 years. Educational pathways for early childhood are divided into two categories: formal and non-formal education. In the formal education pathway, early childhood education for children aged 4-6 years is offered in institutions such as RA (Raudhatul Athfal) or TK (Kindergarten). Children in RA or TK are grouped into two categories: Group A for ages 4-5 years and Group B for ages 5-6 years. Meanwhile, in the non-formal education pathway, children aged 2-4 years can participate in programs like playgroups or early childhood learning groups. Non-formal education typically involves placing children in care for a specific period determined by teachers or childcare centers (TPA) for children aged 0-6 years. TPA serves as an educational unit designed to support children's well-being, functioning as a substitute for families who lack sufficient time to care for their children, often due to work commitments (Literate & Indonesia, 2020).

Early Childhood Character Education According to Ki Hajar Dewantara

In today's modern era, it is crucial to implement character education in children to improve their lives. Ki Hajar Dewantara emphasized that general education is a process aimed at cultivating moral values and character. Education is necessary to create change in children, shaping all aspects of their future lives while ensuring they develop a good personality (Nugroho, 2018). Ki Hajar Dewantara believed that education should be national in scope, yet mindful of local cultures, as Indonesia is home to diverse ethnicities, races, and religions. This diversity should promote and enhance character development in children through a unified educational approach. His educational philosophy includes the principles of *tut wuri handayani* (guiding from behind), *ing ngarsa sung tuladha* (leading by example), and *ing madya mangun karsa* (fostering creativity in the midst of others). The focus of character education should not just be on knowledge acquisition but also on embedding values that shape the character of young children.

The family environment (Prasetiya et al., 2018), schools, and the community are all essential in shaping a child's character and must work together in fostering and developing character. Ki Hajar Dewantara emphasized that children's education should also consider the cultural development, without neglecting foreign influences, to support the character development of early childhood (Mudana, 2019). Taman Indria, the first school established by Ki Hajar Dewantara, was the first nationally founded school. Ki Hajar Dewantara explained that the term "taman" symbolizes flowers, trees, and a shady environment, representing cool air and a wide space for children to play, allowing them to learn in a natural setting.

Character education according to Maria Montessori

At present, numerous early childhood education institutions (PAUD) have been established, reflecting a growing awareness in society about the significance of education for children in achieving the national education objectives. On the other hand, Raudlatul Athfal (RA) education focuses on providing Islamic-based educational services for children. According to Abil (2021), the choice of educational methods is extremely important and must

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be carefully considered, as methods are a fundamental element that directly influences students on a daily basis. Students require an environment that offers novelty, which helps create a comfortable and engaging atmosphere, avoiding monotony. To enhance student enthusiasm, it is essential to incorporate various methods in the learning process. One such method, Montessori, emphasizes the freedom of children while upholding discipline (Irsad, 2018). The educational approach introduced by Maria Montessori remains widely practiced and observed in both developed and developing countries (Syafri, 2013).

Many private schools, particularly those that adopt the Montessori method, are prevalent in the United States. The main goal of all educational methods and theories is to support children's development of independence and productivity as they mature. The Montessori approach focuses on activities that encourage children to learn independently from an early age, fostering traits such as confidence, responsibility, discipline, and self-sufficiency. The programs and practices emphasized in this method are closely aligned with daily life activities. Early childhood education (Maharany et al., 2021) is designed to align with the distinct developmental stages and cultural contexts of children, as envisioned by Maria Montessori. She believed that children undergo developmental phases that require specific, well-planned learning experiences for each stage (Elytasari, 2017).

Montessori began her career as a medical assistant at a psychiatric clinic at a university in Rome, where she had the opportunity to visit asylums for the mentally ill and spent considerable time observing them. Her attention gradually shifted to children with intellectual disabilities, who were housed in the same asylums. This interest led her to engage closely with these children, using a special method she had developed for young learners. Montessori believed that mental health issues were closely linked to pedagogy. Her work with children with mental disabilities ultimately inspired her to establish the *Casa dei Bambini* (Children's House) in 1907 in a poor district of Rome, where she conducted various experiments to find effective and suitable methods for children with intellectual challenges (Elytasari, 2017).

Montessori's View on Children

Montessori's perspective on children is shaped by the ideas of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, who stressed the importance of a supportive and loving environment for the development of a child's natural abilities. She placed great importance on the child's existence and introduced the idea of self-construction in their growth. Montessori argued that the early stages of life have a significant impact on later stages, meaning that the experiences a child has early in life can strongly influence their future adulthood (Zaidatul Inayah et al., 2024). Similarly, the way a child is treated from a young age plays a crucial role in their development. Montessori's views on children can be understood through several key concepts: the child constructs their own psychological development (Child's Self-construction), sensitive periods, the absorbent mind, and the natural laws governing the child's mental growth. As noted earlier, Montessori believed that children naturally follow a specific pattern of psychological development and are inherently driven to shape their own minds.

Driven by this impulse, children naturally attempt to develop and shape themselves by understanding their surroundings. It is also emphasized that although children possess innate psychological patterns and vital drives to achieve their goals, this does not imply that they come with pre-formed behavioral models. Therefore, children develop their growth patterns and strengths from birth through educational interactions. Lillard (1972 in Sollehudin, 2000) outlines two essential conditions for child development: first, a cohesive interaction between the child and their environment (including both objects and people), and second, the child's freedom. Montessori argued that in the early years, children undergo "sensitive periods," during which they are more receptive to certain stimuli. The sensitive periods identified by Montessori are as follows: a. Birth to 3 years: Absorption of sensory experiences b. 1.5 to 3 years: Language development c. 1.5 to 4 years: Coordination and muscle development, interest in small objects d. 2 to 4 years: Reinforcement of movements, interest in

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truth and reality, awareness of time and space sequences e. 2.5 to 6 years: Strengthening of sensory experiences f. 3 to 6 years: Vulnerability to adult influence g. 3.5 to 4.5 years: Writing h. 4 to 4.5 years: Sensory sensitivity i. 4.5 to 5.5 years: Reading Additionally, Montessori believed that the child's soul is still in the process of formation. With their existing knowledge, adults can help children acquire further knowledge. The psychological phenomenon that enables children to acquire knowledge is called the "absorbent mind" concept. Through this process, children unconsciously absorb information from their environment and integrate it into their psyche. The impressions they gather not only enter the child’s mind but also shape it. This unconscious process is gradually replaced by conscious mental activities.

The Principles and Methods of Montessori

The Montessori teaching model is designed to foster the natural development of children, helping them engage with and understand their environment effectively. It is built around five core principles that Montessori educators follow across various programs. The first principle, Respect for the Child, emphasizes honoring the child's needs and desires. Teachers are expected to show mutual respect towards students, fostering an environment where children can become independent, disciplined, well-behaved, and responsible for themselves and their surroundings. In this approach, the teacher serves as a role model, demonstrating behaviors that children can observe and emulate, which helps shape them into individuals capable of self-growth and effective learning. The second principle, Absorption of the Child’s Mind, is based on the belief that children can educate themselves through direct experiences, as opposed to adults who learn through reasoning. Teachers recognize that children learn from their environment, and this learning is influenced by the teacher, the child’s experiences, and their surroundings (Syarif Maulidin, wakib kurniawan, Miftahur Rohman, M. Latif Nawawi, 2024). The third principle, Sensitive Periods, refers to stages when children are particularly receptive to certain behaviors and skills. These sensitive periods vary for each child, and teachers use observation to detect and support the child’s optimal development during these phases. The fourth principle, the Prepared Environment, involves creating a structured space where children can independently engage with materials and activities that support their learning. This environment encourages child-centered education and active learning, with freedom as a key characteristic. Lastly, Autoeducation or self-education, suggests that children are capable of educating themselves when given the freedom and resources to do so. In Montessori classrooms, teachers organize the space to allow children to guide their own learning, fostering independence and self-directed education.

Comparison of the Thoughts of Maria Montessori and Ki Hajar Dewantara

The discussion and research on character development through early childhood education, based on the thoughts of Ki Hajar Dewantara and Maria Montessori, will be analyzed further. A comparison of their ideas will be presented next, starting with their mutual concern for education, particularly for young children. Both of these figures have distinct educational perspectives on how to approach and implement education for early childhood.

Table 2. Comparison of Montessori and Ki Hajar Dewantara ideas

No	Education	Ki Hajar Dewantara	Maria Montessori
1	School Name	Taman Idria	Casa Dei Bambini
2	Philosophy of Early Childhood Education	- Learning should be connected to natural elements. - Early childhood education is intended for children aged 0-7 years.	- Education should align with the child's age. - The learning environment (family, school, and community) should be welcoming and enjoyable.

			- Early childhood education is for children aged 0-6 years. - Education must cater to the child's developmental needs. - Direct interaction between the child and their environment is essential.
3	Teaching Methods	- Among system approach - Method of habituation	- Approach of granting freedom - Experimental approach

Differences and similarities

Two prominent figures in early childhood education, who come from different family backgrounds and countries, are Maria Montessori and Ki Hajar Dewantara. Ki Hajar Dewantara was born in Yogyakarta into a noble family. He received his early education in a Dutch primary school and later pursued studies at the STOVIA medical school. Unfortunately, due to a serious illness, he could not continue his education (Kremen & Kremen, 2023). Maria Montessori, on the other hand, was born in Chiaravalle, Italy, in a family of civil servants. She studied medicine in Italy and graduated in 1896. This section explores the similarities and differences in the educational perspectives of Ki Hajar Dewantara and Maria Montessori on early childhood education.

Maria Montessori and Ki Hajar Dewantara had differing educational philosophies, which are reflected in various aspects, including the names and principles of their schools. The names *Taman Indria* and *Casa Dei Bambini* highlight their distinct educational concepts. The meaning behind these names clearly demonstrates different approaches to early childhood education. *Taman Indria* focuses on learning through three key environments: the school, the family, and the community, encouraging natural learning beyond the classroom. The family plays a fundamental role in providing children with an optimal education (Setyowahyudi, 2020). Children also need enjoyment during the learning process, as they can become bored with classroom settings. They often prefer to learn outdoors, such as in the schoolyard, field, or garden. However, *Casa Dei Bambini* is designed for classroom-based learning. One major difference between the two figures is that *Taman Indria* promotes the development of the children's five senses, while *Casa Dei Bambini* focuses on teaching practical life skills. Both Montessori and Dewantara, however, share similarities in their views on early childhood education. Both agree that children should learn through direct interaction with the natural world, as this approach is considered more engaging than using artificial learning tools. According to both educators, it is crucial for children to be exposed to their natural surroundings so they can directly observe and interact with objects used for learning, creating a more authentic and immersive educational experience.

Maria Montessori and Ki Hajar Dewantara had different views on the early childhood school environment, which they both applied in their educational approaches. They also differed in terms of the locations where early childhood education occurs. However, despite these differences, both figures shared common ideas about education. According to Maria Montessori, learning should take place in a well-structured classroom and play area (Yana et al., 2024). In contrast, Ki Hajar Dewantara had a broader view, believing that education should not be confined to schools but also extend to the community, family, and the environment around the school. All three of these settings should support one another to promote character development for young children.

When it comes to their differing views on methods, Ki Hajar Dewantara proposed a unique approach for shaping young children's character. He emphasized role modeling and the use of habitual practices in his teaching. He also developed the "among" system, which became a guiding principle for education in Indonesia. Despite their differences, both Montessori and Dewantara shared similarities in their educational philosophies. Both used inner methods to help children connect with and understand their creator, as well as outer methods focused on nurturing children's physical development.

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Conclusion

This study compares the educational approaches of two great figures, Ki Hajar Dewantara and Maria Montessori, each with its unique method for shaping children's character. Dewantara emphasizes the habituation of social and moral values through community involvement, while Montessori focuses on children's freedom and independence in learning. Although both approaches have their strengths, combining them could create a more holistic educational model, fostering not only moral character but also independence and social skills in children. Schools can design curricula that integrate Dewantara's values with Montessori's approach to independent learning. For instance, teachers could instill positive habits such as cooperation and responsibility using Dewantara's methods while allowing students to explore and learn independently through Montessori principles. This approach helps children grow into independent individuals with strong character. Additionally, classroom design can support both aspects. There can be areas for free exploration (according to Montessori principles) and structured areas for activities that emphasize moral and social values (following Dewantara's principles). This provides students with the freedom to learn while also teaching them the importance of values in social interactions. Teachers should also receive specialized training on how to blend both approaches in their teaching. They need to understand how to balance giving students the freedom to learn while still instilling important moral values. This training could include techniques for creating an environment that supports personal exploration while integrating value-based learning.

This study has limitations, as it focuses more on the theoretical comparison between the two approaches without empirically testing the effectiveness of combining them in real-world educational settings. Therefore, there are some practical limitations that need to be addressed. Further research should be conducted to examine how this combined model is applied in schools and its impact on students' character development. Case studies or field experiments could help assess the extent to which combining Dewantara's and Montessori's methods influences students in terms of morality, independence, and social skills. Additionally, it is important to explore how technology can support or even hinder the implementation of this combined model. For example, how can technology be used to promote independent learning in the Montessori style while still ensuring the development of strong moral character in line with Dewantara's principles? Furthermore, Dewantara's approach emphasizes community involvement in education, so further research could examine how the involvement of families and communities can strengthen the implementation of both models in schools. This study provides useful insights into the comparison between Dewantara's and Montessori's approaches. However, further research with an empirical approach is essential to validate and further develop this combined model. Future studies should offer clearer guidelines for educators and policymakers to create more effective and holistic educational approaches that meet the needs of children in today's world.

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